Documentation
Conscious Digital Product Creation -TrueGram

During the development of TrueGram, our team prioritized **Conscious Service Design Methods** to make sure that our project was designed with intentionality. Using this framework really helped us to transform our initial ideas into a conscious product. We focused on creating a deeper impact for our users by using these methods. Our initial process started with a basic **Product Ideation** where we made an overview of our "Conscious Social Media" answering questions about the Purpose, Target Audience, Core Idea, Ethical & Responsible Aspects, Impact & Value and Open Questions & Next Steps of our product.
In the defining phase after the first ideation, we used the **WWWWWH method** (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) to structure our thoughts. By answering these questions, we were able to break down the problem space.

WWWWWH Method
Abstract: How to make social media more conscious, so basically doing the opposite of what platforms like Instagram usually do (prevent endless scrolling, no manipulative algorithms). Explore how a more mindful and intentional social media app could look like, something people use in a healthier way overall.

Who (is involved)
- Social media users, especially young people (16–30), who spend a significant amount of time on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, etc.
- We are specifically targeting users who do **NOT** make profit from social media platforms

What (happens)
- Users fall into endless scrolling patterns encouraged by manipulative interface design (infinite feeds, notifications, likes)
- This leads to addictive behavior, reduced self-awareness, and negative impacts on mental health and attention span (i.e. lack of concentration/focus)
- Users often experience reduced focus, increased anxiety, less mindful scrolling behavior and a distorted sense of reality as a result of continuous algorithmic engagement loops

When (does the problem happen)
- Typically during idle or unstructured time (e.g., before bed, commuting, study breaks)
- The issue intensifies during stressful or emotionally vulnerable periods (i.e. approaching deadlines, awkward situations) when users seek distraction
- Users become conditioned to open social media whenever a moment of idleness comes up, turning into automatic scrolling habits/routine

Where (does it happen)?
- On mainstream social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube
- The behavior often extends across multiple devices (phones, tablets, laptops)

Why (does it happen)?

- Platforms are built around business models that monetize attention and prolonged activity: platform owners want to make profit and therefore they need users to use their platform and stay for as long as possible
- Algorithms are optimized for retention, not wellbeing
- Users lack awareness or tools to manage their own digital habits effectively

How (does it happen)?

- Through persuasive design techniques: infinite scroll, variable rewards (likes, new content), personalized feeds, and psychological triggers (FOMO, social comparison)
- The system continuously learns user behavior to refine engagement loops - creating an attention trap
- Scrolling gives users a dopamine spike, gradually conditioning the brain to crave the act of scrolling itself
- Users are not aware how their data is being used and how they can protect themselves from this exploitation (i.e. the opt-out form Meta AI training)
    - With this lack of knowledge, social media platforms can improve algorithms further

Following this method we specified our ideas and started moving to the solution space. This **Brainstorming** process can be traced on ***Figma***. In this stage, we first analyzed the problems that Instagram and "typical" social media platforms face right now. We then answered questions on what solutions already exist and where our consciously designed product can have an impact. This inspired us to think about which features our product should include. All team members noted down their ideas and we continued by rating the features we liked with "stars". In the last step, we clustered the answers with the most stars and similar answers and derived our core features from this.

This next step was really important for our team in the development of our product. During our design process, we utilized the **Critical Reflection Cards** to test our concept and ensure we are building a conscious digital product. This method involved drawing reflection cards at random to explore how our design performs under varying situations. The cards triggered these discussions and reflections and influenced how we defined our user groups.

Card 1

Situation: *The introduction of your solution leads to changes in children's behavior and learning patterns.*

This card triggered a discussion about avoiding typical social media behaviors such as addiction, constant engagement or attention-driven design. It was important for our team not to replicate patterns like endless scrolling, notifications designed to increase screen time, or reward-based loops that influence children's behavior negatively.

We consciously decided not to include a dedicated learning or educational experience within the app. Even though we think that learning features could support children's behaviour, we chose to keep TrueGram clearly positioned as a social media platform. We concluded to avoid feature overload in our product. This focus allows TrueGram to remain simple and purposeful.

Card 2

Situation: *Rapidly changing trends shorten product lifecycles and reduce longevity of your solution.*

This card led us to reflect on how rapidly changing social media trends can shorten product lifecycles. We discussed the risk of relying on trend-driven features, aesthetics, or interaction patterns that may quickly become outdated.

To ensure longevity, we focused on sustainable design principles and modularity. TrueGram is built around stable core values like meaningful connections while allowing individual features to evolve or be replaced without redesigning the entire system. This approach supports long-term use of our application and also reduces the need for constant reinvention. This way we created a more sustainable product that can adapt to change.

Card 3

Situation: *Neurodivergent users see their identities and needs reflected in your solution.*

This card prompted a deeper reflection on how TrueGram represents and supports neurodivergent users. We examined how interface decisions affect sensory processing and cognitive load. We discussed how to design a clear and not overwhelming interface.

The discussion focused on ensuring that neurodivergent needs are integrated as core design considerations, not optional add-ons. This reflection reinforced the importance of simplicity, predictable interaction, so users can engage with TrueGram in ways that align with their individual sensory and cognitive preferences.

Card 4

Situation: *A person feels pressured to engage with your solution everyday to stay connected or relevant.*

This card prompted a discussion about the risk of users feeling pressured to check TrueGram daily to stay connected or “relevant”, which we believe to be a common issue in traditional social media. We reflected on how design elements like notifications, streaks, or reward loops could unintentionally create anxiety or addictive use.

As a result, we avoided features that drive addictive behavior. TrueGram emphasizes mindful and purposeful engagement over constant interaction. This decision influenced the design of notifications and feed structure to make sure users can participate on their own terms without feeling pressured, while keeping the platform social.

Card 5

Situation: *Stereotypes and exclusionary design patterns are evident in your solution.*

This card prompted us to examine whether TrueGram's design unintentionally reinforces stereotypes or excludes certain groups. We reflected on elements like imagery, language, and feature assumptions that might favor dominant social norms or overlook marginalized groups.
The discussion led to conscious decisions to center inclusivity in our interface and content. We support diverse representations, neutral language, and flexible features that accommodate different abilities, identities, and cultural contexts. This reflection reinforced that inclusion isn't an optional feature in our app. It must be included in the core design to make all users feel seen and respected.

Card 6
Situation: *Women and people of marginalized genders feel represented and visible in your solution.*
This card prompted us to examine how TrueGram represents women and people of marginalized genders. Similar to the card before, we discussed whether features, language, and visual elements reflect diverse experiences and avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes.
The discussion reinforced the importance of visibility and empowerment.

Key Takeaways
By putting ourselves in the shoes of the users through these perspective shifts, we identified vulnerable user groups**.** Specifically, how younger users might be disproportionately affected as well as neurodivergent users and females. The critical reflection cards also helped us define our features. It made us think about how we can implement characteristics that support our user group the most and fulfill our idea of having an impact with our product.

After the Critical Reflection Cards we focused on the **Inclusive User Groups**. We defined our primary user group being Young Adults (Age 16-30) and three secondary user groups being Neurodivergent Users, Inspiration Seekers and Young Women. By filling out the data about each group, continuing with the Wheel of Power, following the Role, Needs and Pains and lastly forming User Stories, we quickly were able to reflect on them and see how they interact with each other. This method was helpful for us as it made the impact of our product more clear and specific. It also really helped us to reflect on the needs and pains of our core users.
The filled Inclusive User Cards as well as the Reflection can be viewed via **this link.**

Another important part of our project was the definition of the **Systemic Journey Map.** It is already included in the website and can be viewed there.

Overall, the **Conscious Service Design methods** were invaluable in shaping TrueGram. They encouraged us to view the product from multiple perspectives, including those of marginalised and neurodivergent users. Tools such as Inclusive User Groups and the Wheel of Power helped us to identify privileges and potential exclusion. Critical Reflection Cards prompted discussions about behavioural impact, engagement patterns, representation and sustainability. This guided

us to prioritise mindful and inclusive interactions in our choices. Overall, these methods heightened our awareness of TrueGram's broader social and ethical implications. We believe that all of this resulted in a more thoughtful and user-centred solution.

Contributions

Generally, all team members contributed equally to the development of our product. The **Product Ideation** was done as a group as well as the discussions of the Reflection Cards. For the **Inclusive User Groups** each team member focused on one group.

- Young Adults -> Bene
- Neurodivergent Users -> Mark
- Inspiration Seekers -> Troy and Mikhail
- Young Females -> Paula

And for completing the **Systemic Journey Map**, each team member completed one column of the journey phases.

- Consideration & Decision -> Bene
- Retention & Growth -> Mark
- Primary Challenge & Triggers and Awareness & Initial Interest -> Troy
- Usage -> Mikhail
- Onboarding -> Paula

In addition we had the following individual contributions:

Bene

- Design of prototypes
- Development of app
- First Presentation: Problem Section
- Final Presentation: Product & Solution

Mark

- Preparation and writing of website content
- Development of app
- First Presentation: Product Goal & Competitive Landscape
- Final Presentation: Product Goal

Troy

- Creation and conductment of user survey
- First Presentation: Product Concept
- Final Presentation: Problem Section & User Research

Mikhail

- Production of video content
- First Presentation: Systemic Journey Map
- Final Presentation: Impact Statement

Paula

- Preparation and writing of website content

- Formulation of Documentation
- First Presentation: User Groups
- Final Presentation: Reflection

AI Transparency Statement

In preparing this project, our team used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to correct grammar, draft text, refine our ideas, and edit structure across all sections. We used it to improve phrasing for clarity reasons and coherence. Our team carefully reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs to verify their correctness, coherence, and suitability for inclusion in this work. The final responsibility for the content presented in this project rests solely on our team.